

# **The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hasmonean State**

Hanan Eshel

## **Chapter Seven**

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*Reviewed by Jim West*

To summarize briefly to this point: Eshel persuasively argues in the preceding chapters, and this one as well, that there are numerous references to the Hasmoneans in several of the Scrolls found at Qumran. And not only to the Hasmoneans, but to various historical events and circumstances.

I suggested earlier that if Eshel's argument had an essential weakness, it is his seeming willingness to accept Josephus at face value. This remains the essential weakness in the book as a whole since Eshel depends rather heavily on Josephus for his historical reconstruction. If it were discovered that Josephus were wrong, or misrepresented the facts intentionally for his own ideological agenda, then Eshel's case would be seriously weakened. Would his case crumble? Perhaps not. But the framework upon which he seems to be building is so tightly tied to Josephus that it would be seriously imperiled.

Now turning back to the present chapter, Eshel here discusses the period leading up to the Roman incursion into Palestine and the first 10 years of that occupation and opines 'Some of the scrolls found at Qumran throw some light onto this turbulent period. The political and religious situation documented in the Peshier on Nahum (4QpNah) reflects the period of Alexandra's reign...' (p. 133). And again 'References to the rule of Alexandra and her sons are also found in three scrolls (4Q331-4Q333) which mention the priestly courses and some historical events' (p. 136). These texts are all subjected to Eshel's analytic eye and they, along with Josephus, aid in his reconstruction of the historical situation.

Certainly this may appear, again, to be circular. Josephus and the DSS imply this particular historical situation and this particular historical situation implies this or that text in Josephus or the Scrolls. And there may be a bit of circularity in his argument after all. But, and here's the important issue, Eshel rises above circularity by his careful use of exegetical methods. These texts really do shed light on the historical situation.

Eshel next tackles an old debate regarding the name 'Potlaid' of 4Q468e and to whom it refers. After offering optional interpretations, he decides upon 'Peitholaos, a Jewish officer who in 57 BCE joined Gabinius ... in his war against Alexander, the son of Aristobulus II' (p. 143). Regrettably, the edition of the Dead Sea Scrolls in my possession – that of Garcia-Martinez and Tigchelaar – does not contain this text and simply lists its publication as forthcoming. I rather wish I had it so that I could check the reading. Since I cannot, I'll leave aside any other potential readings and rely on the doubtless correctness of Eshel's.

Finally, Eshel discusses the famine of 65 BCE and shows how the *Peshier on Hosea A* and the *Peshier on Isaiah B* (4Q162) reference it. Similarly, '... the author of the Peshier on Psalms A [labels] the famine of 65 BCE as the "Appointed Time of Fasting" [because] ... the people who did not join the "Congregation of the Elects" perished from famine and plague' (p. 149).